



## Time – and time again

When children begin to tell stories they use oral structures, where there is no need for the formalities of written English. They can use facial expressions and gestures to supplement their relating of tales. The passage of time is represented by straightforward and easily understood structures such as *'On the weekend ...'*, *'When we went to the ...'*, *'Yesterday/ Today/Tomorrow ...'*, and the totally reliable *'and then ...'*, which is usually followed by *'and then ..., and then ..., and then ...'*. These transfer easily to early written text, and are appropriate for Early Stage 1/Foundation writing.

We need to move students into more varied and useful ways to indicate time and its passage, and to maintain cohesion across text.

Much of the language appropriate for use in spoken and written text in English is appropriate to be used in subjects such as maths, history, geography, PD/H/PE, music and science.

Both the Australian curriculum and the NSW English syllabus articulate the importance of teaching about time expressions:

The Australian curriculum: ACELA1491; ACELA1495, ACLFWU165, ACMEM078 <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Search/?q=time%20connectives> accessed 26/8/18

NSW English syllabus: ENe-8B, EN1-4A, EN1-8B, EN1-9B, EN2-9B, EN3-6B etc.

## The grammar of time

The clause is a unit of meaning that expresses a message, and is often seen as the basic unit for analysing the English language. The clause is built around the verb – the process, the action, or what is happening.

Time is linked to the process because it tells about the circumstance of the action.

The time of an action can be represented:

- *At a point in time – when?*
  - *I'll be home at 4 o'clock.*
  - *We got home late that night.*
  - *He has to get dressed immediately.*



- *Duration in time – how long?*
  - *He was there for two hours.*
  - *Gradually the water changed colour.*
  - *They lived happily ever after.*
- *Frequency – how many times?*
  - *Mum goes to the library every week.*
  - *We often have a picnic at the beach in summer.*
  - *They regularly have pizza for dinner.*

Deriwanka provides a comprehensive list of adverbs and prepositional phrases which function as circumstances of time in *A New Grammar Companion* for Teachers, p.72.

Guides for using extended circumstances and those providing finer detail are provided in the Derewianka text, p. 78.

For example, instead of the following, make a suggestion for:

- *in winter – use: when it is cold and windy; between 6 and 8 o'clock; as soon as ...*
- *a long time – use: on and on and on; seemed to take forever; after about an hour ...*
- *sometimes – use: occasionally; now and then; from time to time ...*
- *and then – use: when we got there; suddenly; after the picnic ...*

Timelines, illustrated flow charts, and family histories can shortcut the need for using time connectives, as they use a visual structure for indicating the passage of time.

Time expressions are used with specificity in sequential explanations, flow charts, lists of instructions, procedural texts, recounts of events, and in narratives.

## **Teaching: writing about time**

Models from the students' own texts are an effective way to introduce the range of the possibilities of time connectives to students.

Supplement this with examples from authentic texts.

Move the students into recounting events from wordless texts.



- Most wordless texts have a clear narrative structure, with each step of the story clearly shown. Read the text with the students. You only need to draw their attention to the sequence across the page. There are no words, so you don't have to use any – the story tells itself.  
Once you have finished, talk about the story. Return to some pages which have a strong sequence of action that you want to draw students' attention to. Model clause structures that indicate what the characters were doing, and when. Introduce the time expressions you want students to focus on. Use a prepared sample page or two and ask students to look closely at the pictures, and make up sentences about what is happening.
- Model the construction of a recount of a particular event. Encourage students to contribute to the building of the sentences. Pay particular attention to the time terms you want students to use, and which add clarity to your text,  
*eg Last weekend we went to the mountains. We finally arrived at Katoomba. We were all hungry, but we started our bush walk straight away. At lunch time we had a picnic near a waterfall. The mountain forest was fresh and cool. After about an hour we found a place where there were lots of waratahs. We took lots of photos, then walked back to the car. It was a lovely day.*
- Students can then construct their own recounts of an event at school, or something they want to share from home. Concentrate on both the spoken and written use of the time expressions, and introduce more as required.

In this resource we have not looked at how time can be represented in the use of *tense*, which will be examined in another resource.

## Suggested texts

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### **Foundation/Early Stage 1 to Stage 1**

*The Snowman* by Raymond Briggs (1980) Picture Puffin UK

*Mirror* by Jeannie Baker (2010) Walker Books, Australia

*Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins (1977) Picture Puffin UK (Limited words)

*The Very Kind Rich Lady and Her One Hundred Dogs* by Chinlun Lee (2003) Walker Books UK

*The Arrival* by Shaun Tan's (suitable for older students)



## Other suggestions

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Read from new and familiar stories, drawing attention to the ways authors tell us when, how long, and how many times events occur.

Use graphic texts and select a page with lots of activity so students can create the text for the action and events.

## References

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Derewianka, B. (2011) *A New Grammar Companion for Teachers e:lit* (PETA) Australia

Derewianka, B. & Jones, P. (2nd Edition 2016) *Teaching Language in Context* OUP Australia

## Useful resources

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Humphrey, s., Droga, L., & Feez, S. (2012) *Grammar and Meaning* PETAA Australia